

Light

A photograph of a camel caravan in a desert. The scene is set in a vast, orange-hued desert with rolling sand dunes. In the foreground, a line of five camels is walking from left to right. Each camel is carrying a colorful, patterned saddlebag. A person in a blue robe is walking alongside the first camel, leading the caravan. The background shows more sand dunes under a bright, hazy sky.

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*Light Bible Publications,
PO Box 760
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Editor: Colin Dryland

Technical Editor: Ken Dennis

Correspondence Secretary: Tony Austin

Publications Secretary: John Lanckmans

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"The Dawn" Christadelphians
Sutton District Ecclesia
Box 931
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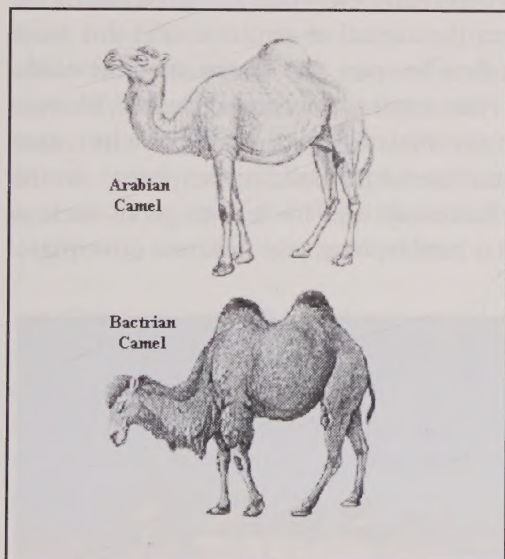
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Cover picture: Camels in the Sahara Desert

Animals of the Bible

The Camel



THERE ARE TWO types of camel mentioned in the Bible, the two-humped Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) and the one-humped Arabian camel (*Camelus dromedarius*). The camel is among the first animals to be named in the Bible record. They are included in a list of gifts from the Egyptian Pharaoh to Abraham.

[Genesis 12.16]

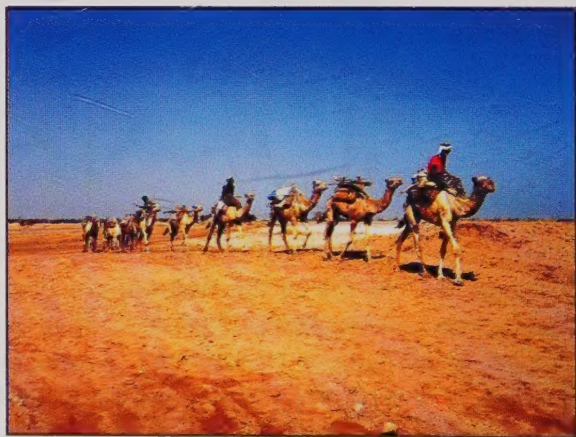
Long ago, the use of the Bactrian camel in Bible lands was set in stone, carved on the Black Obelisk of Shalmanezar III (830 BC) that once stood in Nimrud (Calah) and is now displayed in the British Museum. However the Arabian camel seems to have been the most used animal and made up the wealth in livestock belonging to Abraham and Jacob, two of the patriarchs of Israel. We find also that Job owned a huge flock of camels running into thousands *[Genesis 24.35: 30.43: 32.7: Job 1.3,17: 42.12]*.

Under the Mosaic Law the camel is listed as unclean, or not to be eaten. However most of the other peoples of Bible times did include

camel meat in their diet. Apart from this prohibition imposed on the Israelites, the camel proves to be one of the most useful animals to own. The products from the camel's body alone help to sustain life in the dry desert lands.

The milk from the female camel is very rich and drinkable and is also used to make butter and cheese. The camel's hair is used to weave into cloth of different qualities depending on when it is taken from the animal's body. Soft wool covers the animal in winter and if this wool is collected in the spring it can then be spun and woven into fine cloth. John the Baptist we are told, *'was clothed in camel's hair'* [Matthew 3.4]. Even its dung is used for fuel and when mixed with other materials it is made into a mortar, useful for building purposes. At the end of its life the animal's hide has many uses for leather goods such as sandals, harnesses, saddles, water bottles, bags and furniture coverings.

In the camel we have an animal that has been wonderfully designed and created for desert life. During a sandstorm it can close its nostrils to keep out the whirling sand. Heavy eyelashes protect the eyes and the eye itself has a membrane that winks



across the eye clearing the sand away. The bony projecting eyebrows also shield the camel's eyes, especially from the bright desert sun.

The animal can go without food and water for days. It has three stomachs; the first two have a number of pouches that are closed by the action of muscles, where water is stored. When it is very thirsty the

camel can drink as much as twenty gallons (90.9 litres) of water at one time. This means that when Rebekah offered water from the well to the ten camels of Abraham's servant, it was no small task that she volunteered for - no wonder he was impressed! [Genesis 24.18-21].

Then the hump, where people once thought the camel stored its water, is actually a storage organ where fat is built up in spongy tissue as a reserve of food. When the camel has no water it doesn't draw fluid from the blood as humans do, the camel is able to draw on these reserves to sustain it and survive in the harsh desert conditions. The camel's body temperature changes only a few degrees, so it perspires very little and loses only a small amount of water when on the move. It can travel over desert terrain with ease, its tough flexible footpad spreads as it walks and stops the animal sinking in soft sand and copes easily with uneven rocky ground too.

They can carry heavy loads over long distances. In earliest times camels transported the patriarchs of the Bible and their families from one place to another. Traders have used them to move large quantities of precious goods from one country to another. They earned the name of '*ships of the desert*' by forming long caravans of heavily loaded camels trailing along established routes from city to city. They are the equivalent of today's juggernaut lorries.

One cruel episode in Joseph's life involved one of these camel caravans as it travelled through Canaan. We recall how Joseph's brothers had intended killing him, but '*there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry them down to Egypt... (The brothers) .. sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt*' [Genesis 37.25-28].

This Ishmaelite camel caravan travelling from Gilead to Egypt gives us a picture of one facet of life in ancient times. These caravans could vary in size, but they were virtually self-contained units

travelling from oasis to oasis with their loads of valuable materials that were not readily available to the peoples they met and traded with. The chance meeting with the sons of Jacob and the opportunity to buy a healthy young man and sell him as a slave in Egypt for a nice profit was not to be missed.

Another event recorded in the Bible that would have been a wonder to see was the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Israel to see King Solomon. *'Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones...'*[1 Kings 10.2 NIV]. The journey of this royal company and its arrival in Jerusalem was equivalent to today's rulers making state visits in their motorcades. In this case it was the humble camel that provided the means of transport for an impressive and colourful parade.

The camel features also in the teaching of Jesus. On one occasion he said, *"...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* [Matthew 19.24]. A study of the chapter shows that Jesus had just told a rich young man to divest himself of his worldly possessions if he wanted to follow him. Even the disciples wondered what he meant, but it is suggested that Jesus was referring to the narrow opening by the city gates that latecomers used to enter the city after dark when the main gate was shut. This side gate (the eye of the needle) might just allow the ungainly camel to be squeezed through, but only if it had been unloaded of all its goods and equipment.

The lesson is there for all of us, even today, who want to follow Christ, to put aside anything that can stop us entering the kingdom of God (See article on this subject – Volume 18.6 Page 17).

Ken Dennis
Kent, England

‘In the beginning God created...’ [Genesis 1.1]

‘WE HAVE NO absolute proof of Evolution...the theory of Evolution would be abandoned tomorrow if a better theory appeared’ [*Nature: 12 March 1981 page 82*].

The origin of life is unknown to science. The Law of Biogenesis observes that life only comes from life. Louis Pasteur proved scientifically that life does not come from non-life, a fact that is the basis of the food canning industry to this day.

Mutations, said to be the source of new genetic material, are harmful to life and often lethal. Deliberately induced mutations in over 3,000 consecutive generations of fruit flies have failed to produce a better fruit fly, or to increase its viability.

As Charles Darwin admitted, there is no actual evidence of any species having developed into another species. All known species (several million) appear fully developed with all vital organs fully operational. There are no part-formed eyes, half developed intestines or evolving feathers.

Many animals possess sophisticated equipment that science has been unable to replicate: the radar system of bats, the sonar of whales and dolphins, the electro-detection system of the platypus, the aerodynamics of hummingbirds, the navigation systems of many birds and the amazing self-repair system of most forms of life. Such sophisticated facilities require a superintelligence to install.

While single-celled creatures are numerous, there are none with two, three, four or even twenty cells. Thus there is no evolutionary sequence from single-celled to multi-celled creatures.

Symbiosis, the interdependence of two forms of life, such as the fig tree and the fig-gall wasp, the yucca plant and *Pronuba* moth, pollen plants and the bee, each dependent for life upon the other, must have been formed complete at the same time.

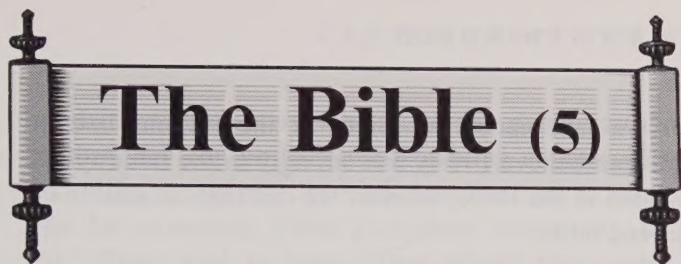
The so-called missing link between one form of life and another requires many millions of missing links if a slow evolutionary process did actually take place. All are missing.

(Extract from Creation Evolution & Science, pp.127-129 by J.V.Collyer 1993)

If you are interested in looking further into the evidence to support Creation please send for your FREE copy of the special issue entitled *Light on Creation* (address on inside back cover)



Example of part of a Roman pot unearthed at Wrotham, Kent, UK. Under the coloured glaze it can be seen to have been made from the local grey clay (See page 13).



Can we trust the Bible?

‘Your testimonies, which you have commanded, are righteous and very faithful’ [Psalm 119. 138].

WHAT CAN WE have confidence in these days? In the early 1900’s many Western currencies were based on the gold standard. UK travellers were told, *‘If you go anywhere with sterling you are safe’*. The UK abandoned the gold standard in 1931 and the U.S.A, in 1971 during the presidency of Richard Nixon. Nowadays we have to look at the rates of exchange before we book our overseas travel. These rates fluctuate daily according to world events.

At one time you could perhaps trust government officials – ministers of the Crown. People regarded the US President as a symbol of integrity at the head of a mighty, Western nation. In recent years various UK government ministers have become tainted by accusations of ‘sleaze.’ One only has to think of the way that President Nixon’s regime ended, to recognise that David was right when he wrote in the Psalms, *‘Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help’* [Psalm 146.3].

So the question that heads this article is an important one. What do we really mean when we ask the question ‘Can we trust the Bible’? Here are two definitions from the Concise Oxford Dictionary:

- **Confidence:** firm trust; assured expectation.
- **Trust:** firm belief in the honesty, veracity, justice, strength etc. of a person or thing.

When we talk about the Bible in these terms, we are asking whether we can believe firmly and strongly in the honesty and truth of what is written in the Bible, whether we can rely on what it says and be able to depend on it.

WHAT KIND OF EVIDENCE DO WE NEED?

Several years ago the writer was following a van, which was behind a car driving along a busy street in north London. A woman stepped off the kerb on to a pedestrian crossing, the car braked suddenly but only stopped when it actually touched the woman who fell but was not hurt. The van behind swerved to avoid hitting the car but was in turn bumped by a car coming the other way, fortunately not travelling fast. This accident happened right outside a police station.

A police officer took names and addresses of witnesses (including mine) and a couple of months later we were called to give evidence in court. The case was concluded before I was called and an officer on duty that morning said that the way that the witnesses had all agreed was quite remarkable. He said that sometimes the witnesses in accident cases do not even agree on the colour of the vehicles involved, let alone their estimate of the speed they were travelling. The police officer then made a statement that has stuck in my memory: *'When two or three people tell exactly the same story (and it doesn't happen often) – it must have happened that way.'*

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE BIBLE

Mark records that on one occasion Jesus was followed by a great crowd when he wanted to go away quietly with his disciples. Because he felt they were like *'sheep without a shepherd'* he began teaching them and continued for some while.

'By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said,

“and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five – and two fish.” Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the **green grass**. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish’

[Mark 6.35–44 NIV].

The miracle of the ‘Feeding of the Five Thousand’ is recorded in all four Gospel records. What is fascinating is to see some of the finer details of these four written accounts. Matthew says that the people were made to sit down on the **grass** *[Matthew 14.19]*. In the passage above Mark writes that the people sat down on the **green grass** *[Mark 6. 39]*. John says ‘There was **much grass** in the place’ *[John 6.10]*. It is John also who tells us that it was the time of the Passover. All these statements fit exactly together. In the climate of Israel, for much of the year the grass is sparse, dried and brown. The time of year when grass is plentiful is in Springtime – the **time of the Passover** – when in the words of the Gospel writers there would be **much grass** and the **grass would be green**.

There is another detail that links the Gospel writer’s accounts

Luke says that the miracle took place near Bethsaida [Luke 9.10]. John tells us that Philip was the disciple that Jesus asked about buying food [John 6.5]. These two apparently unrelated facts become significant when we learn that Philip came from Bethsaida [John 1. 43, 44]. This was his home so he was the obvious one to ask about buying food in this locality.

‘When two or three people (or four!) tell the same story – it must have happened that way.’

Here is a pointer to the answer to the question we started with – Can we trust the Bible? There are other examples of detailed corroboration in the Gospels and in many other places in the Bible. The books of Kings and Chronicles contain parallel accounts of much of the history of Israel. The prophet Isaiah was contemporary with King Hezekiah and these accounts confirm each other, sometimes in very small details.

In 1847, J.J. Blunt wrote a book about undesigned scriptural coincidences. The Preface to the 19th edition says:

‘This work of J.J. Blunt... has been highly valued by many generations of Bible students who have found it first of all a fascinating study of Scripture in its own right; but much more than that - a source of persuasive evidence for the truth of God’s Word.

The author shows how hundreds of Bible passages illustrate coincidences which were undesigned by the writers, which involve the agreement of widely separated authors to the facts which they relate, and which point to the truth of recorded miracles and of prophecies.’ [*Undesigned Coincidences in the writings of the Old and New Testament* – 19th edition 1983]

The publishers of '**Light on a New World**' are not surprised by these examples of detailed textural harmony. As was explained in the second article in this series, the Bible claims to be the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote that the Scriptures were '**inspired by God**' – that is, the writers wrote because God '**breathed into them**' what He wanted them to write. That is the meaning of the word '**inspired**'. In the previous article we referred to the Apostle Peter's words that Bible prophecy '*never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*' [2 Peter 1. 21 NIV].

ANOTHER KIND OF HARMONY

Think of what we have learned about the Bible in this series:

THE BIBLE

a library of 66 books

divided into two groups

the Old Testament written before Christ and

the New Testament written after Christ

There were 40 writers of the books

The books were written over a period of 1,500 years

They were written in widely separated countries -

Babylon, Greece, Israel, Egypt, Italy, Asia Minor etc.

These different writers, separated by time and distance, are not only in textural harmony but their teaching on fundamental issues is also in complete harmony. Examples of this harmony are found in every article in every issue of this magazine. The authors of the articles quote from every part of the Bible and the writers of the Bible books all agree whatever the subject of the article. Think about the teaching of the Bible about man and his natural state (in contrast to what many people believe today).

The book of Genesis explains that mankind is mortal – that is ‘dying’ and this is the result of man’s disobedience to God. This disobedience is called ‘sin’. So Paul wrote in New Testament times, ‘*the wages of sin is death*’ [Romans 6. 23]. ‘Death’ in the Bible refers to complete extinction and unconsciousness at the end of life. David in the Psalms and Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, hundreds of years after the book of Genesis and later the writings of the prophets all teach the same thing:

‘Like sheep they are laid in the grave...’ [Psalm 49. 14]

‘His spirit departs, he returns to his
earth; In that very day his plans perish.’ [Psalm 146. 4]

‘...there is no work or device or knowledge
or wisdom in the grave where you are going.’ [Ecccl 9. 10]

‘...The soul who sins shall die.’ [Ezekiel 18. 4]

‘...they shall be as though they had never been.’ [Obadiah 16]

In spite of the fact that the Egyptians (who held Israel as slaves for a long period) had a strong belief in an after life – as did the Assyrians and Babylonians later and the Romans in New Testament times – the consistent Bible teaching through the centuries is that man dies because of sin; the dead are unconscious and it is only a hope in the resurrection that can allow us to look beyond the eternal grave.

‘...as through one man sin entered the world, and
death through sin, and thus death spread to all men,
because all sinned’ [Romans 5. 12].

‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is
eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’ [Romans 6. 23].

‘...now Christ has risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive...Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at his coming’ [1 Corinthians 15. 20-23].

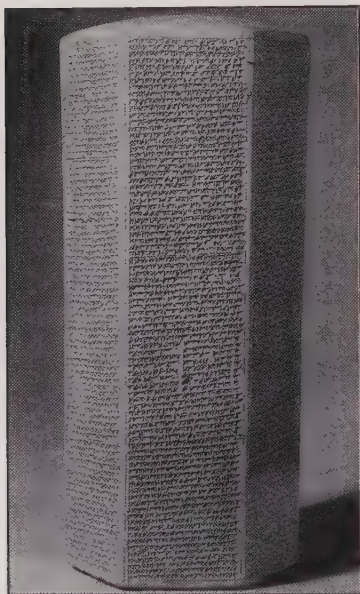
One of the strongest evidences for the inspiration of the Bible is the consistency of its teaching, despite the long periods during which its books were written and the complete harmony of its records.

THE TESTIMONY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

When the M26 motorway was being constructed in the part of Kent where the writer of this article worked at the time, beds of smooth grey clay were uncovered by the mechanical diggers. It had long been thought that there had been a Roman pottery in the area. Now the evidence was being uncovered. Not only was the raw material being revealed, but hundreds of examples of pieces of pottery made from the same clay were being unearthed (see picture on page 6).

In the same way that fragments of pots and jars confirmed the site of a Roman pottery, so archaeology has confirmed many of the historical records in the Bible.

The cuneiform writing on the Taylor prism which is in the British Museum (see picture on page 14) gives the Assyrian account of the events described in Chronicles and in the writing of the prophet Isaiah. The Assyrian record says: *‘I besieged Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke and I captured forty six of his strong cities and fortresses, innumerable small cities which were round about them, with the battering rams and the assault engines and the attack of foot soldiers...himself (Hezekiah) like a caged bird I shut up within Jerusalem his royal city.’*



Many details in this record (and others) confirm the Bible account. However, the Assyrian record does not say how Sennacherib the Assyrian king was defeated after Hezekiah had prayed for God's help. The Assyrian account simply says that Sennacherib returned to his own royal city Nineveh. Isaiah had recorded, *'By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city'* [Isaiah 37. 33-36].

The period of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires is rich in tablets and monuments relating to nearly all their kings who are also mentioned in the Bible. The British Museum's own

publications provide a wealth of fascinating material for the Bible student.

HEZEKIAH'S CONDUIT

There have been times when the Bible critics have said that something just could not have happened. The Bible gives an account of the way that Hezekiah had a water course constructed through the rock to bring water from the Spring of Gihon – later called the Virgin's Fountain' into Jerusalem to make sure that there was a good water supply for the city when the Assyrians invaded. At the same time access to the springs outside the city was blocked up. *'This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the West Side of the City of David'* [2 Chronicles 32.30] (see parallel account in 2 Kings 20).

The critics said at one time that the science of engineering was not developed sufficiently at the time of Hezekiah to enable this conduit to be constructed. This cannot be said today because the conduit from outside the old city of Jerusalem into the Pool of Siloam has been

discovered. In addition, near the entrance was an inscription written in the square Hebrew characters of Hezekiah's time which tells of the construction of the tunnel. This inscription was removed by the Turkish authorities so that it could be displayed in the Istanbul Museum.

Archaeology does not directly **prove** the inspiration of the Bible but the confirmation it provides for so many of the Biblical records, gives us confidence that we can trust its history.

THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY

This is the line of evidence that the Almighty Himself, in His mercy, has given us to strengthen our faith in His Word. The Bible does not only teach us that God **knows** how His purpose is to be worked out but that He **declares** '*the end from the beginning*' [Isaiah 46.10] and that He **reveals** what He intends to do through His servants the prophets [Amos 3.7]. We can look at the history of Israel for specific examples of prophecy fulfilled and fulfilling – "*You are my witnesses,*" says the LORD' [Isaiah 43.10]. Two examples from Israel's history will illustrate the point.

FIRST EXAMPLE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

Abraham was the father of a nation that had a very chequered history. There were times when they displayed confidence and trust in God and as a nation wanted to gain His approval. "*All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient*" [Exodus 24.7].

There were other times when the people were faithless and disobedient to God's commandments. During the period when they were ruled by Judges before the establishment of the kingdom, it was said that '*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*' [Judges 17.6].

Abraham's son was Isaac, and his grandson was Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons and the story of Joseph, sold by his jealous brothers as a slave into Egypt, is recorded in the book of Genesis. Because of famine, eventually the whole family settled in Egypt where they prospered and

multiplied. After the death of Joseph there began a period when the Hebrews (the descendants of Jacob) were forced into slavery by the Egyptians who were frightened that in time of war the Hebrews might support the enemy. This period of slavery did not end until the time of Moses and the Exodus, *'At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt'* [Exodus 12. 41 NIV]. It was 430 years from the time the promise was confirmed to Abraham and 400 years of oppression from Joseph to the Exodus.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Abraham was given a vision in which he heard the voice of God, *'I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward'* [Genesis 15.1]. Then in response to Abraham's prayer and as a sign that God's hand would be seen in the history of Abraham's descendants, the record in Genesis says,

'As the sun was setting, Abram (Abraham) fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions"'

[Genesis 15.12-14 NIV].

After the time of Jesus, when the Jewish authorities were persecuting the early Christians, the Apostle Stephen referred to this prophecy and its fulfilment.

Stephen was on trial for his life. He was arguing that God had made promises to Abraham that are the basis of the true Christian hope. His accusers ought to have known their own history. They should have known that in their history was the evidence that God was in control all the way through. Stephen, in his defence speech, went through the main events from the time of Abraham:

‘...God promised him (Abraham) that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated for four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterwards they will come out of that country and worship me in this place’ [Acts 7, 5–7 NIV].

Here are the key points of this example:

ABRAHAM was told of the oppression of his descendants. The actual time period was given [*Genesis 15*].

ISAAC

JACOB had twelve sons – Joseph – Egypt.

MOSES and the

EXODUS The exact end of the 400 years was recorded
[Exodus 12].

After the time of Christ, Stephen used this as evidence that God's hand can be seen at work in the history of the Jews. *'You are my witnesses'* [Isaiah 43. 10].

SECOND EXAMPLE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

The first king of the nation of Israel was Saul. He was later followed by David and Solomon. After the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided into a northern kingdom of Israel (which was eventually destroyed by Assyria) and a southern kingdom of Judah which lasted 100 years longer than the kingdom of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah who lived in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was invading the land wrote:

‘I will banish...sounds of joy and gladness...This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years’ [*Jeremiah 25. 10,11 NIV*].

Here is a very specific time period. Not only was the land desolated by the Babylonian armies, but also thousands of captives were taken to Babylon. One of these was a very young man of noble birth – Daniel. He was to become prominent in the Babylonian court and eventually was made ruler of one of the three major provinces of the empire. In spite of the honours he gained, he was a Jew and his heart was always looking for the restoration of Jerusalem.

Babylon eventually fell to the Medes and became part of the Medo-Persian empire. Daniel was now a very old man and there is a wonderful passage in the book that bears his name in the Bible:

‘In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom – in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer...’ [*Daniel 9. 1-3 NIV*].

Daniel had read the book of Jeremiah and knew his prophecy of the 70 years captivity. He knew he was now living at the end of this time – so he prayed to God.

The rich archaeological evidence from this period enables the dates to be identified fairly accurately. Seventy years after the fall of Jerusalem, Cyrus the new king who followed Darius, made a decree that the Jews should be allowed to return and rebuild Jerusalem. Other conquered nations were given similar privileges (again as Jeremiah had foretold).

In these examples we have two specific time periods. Each was foretold in advance and the end of each is also recorded.

These are only two of many examples of prophecies detailed in advance. The history of Israel, with all its ups and downs; its invasions and captivities; its sieges and the long period of almost 2,000 years desolation following the Roman occupation, followed by the restoration of the nation in the 20th century – has been described as an ‘impossible history’. **Yet almost every stage was foretold by prophecy.**

‘You are my witnesses.’

If the reader is interested in Biblical archaeology, a useful introduction is ‘LIGHT on Bible Archaeology’ published by LIGHT Bible Publications. This can be obtained free from the publishers.

For a survey of a number of examples of the evidence of prophecy, ‘LIGHT on Prophecy’ can be had free from the same publishers (Address inside the back cover of this magazine).

THIS EVIDENCE SUPPORTS OUR TRUST

We can be confident. The only explanation for the wealth of fulfilled, detailed prophecy relating to nations, cities, individuals and events, is that the Bible is a revelation from God Himself. The writers were inspired. Its claim to be the Word of God is well founded.

The evidence of:

- The Bible’s textural harmony
- The unity of its message
- Its miraculous preservation (see previous articles)
- The testimony of archaeology
- The witness of fulfilled prophecy

all testify that the Bible was written because the writers were moved by the Holy Spirit [2 Peter 1. 21]. It was written because the writers were inspired. This is the only explanation of its uniqueness.

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

In the fullest sense of the question – the answer must be ‘Yes’.

If then the Bible is the Word of God, we have a responsibility to read it, to listen to its message and to act upon it!

Michael Walker
Kent, England

NOTE FOR READERS

We have made two important changes in this issue of LIGHT on a New World. Firstly the size of the text has been increased from 10 to 11 point.

Secondly we have changed the version of the Bible to be used for the majority of our quotations. In the past we have mainly used the King James or Authorised version (AV). The editorial committee of Light have decided to adopt the New King James version (NKJV) which is widely available in the English speaking world. All Bible quotations in this and future issues will be from the NKJV unless otherwise stated. Where other versions are occasionally used, the particular version will be shown in parenthesis at the end of each quotation.

Bible Characters

Cain and Abel

THIS IS THE first article in a series of character sketches of important people in the Bible. The contributors will look at individual qualities and distinctive personality traits, so that we might draw lessons for ourselves.

A large part of Scripture is concerned with people. The choice of subject is selective and the space given to individuals varies greatly. Writers were inspired to record within the framework of God's plan for the world, centred in His chosen people Israel and we read of various key players who have an impact on the unfolding events.

The content of this 'Book of Books' is not therefore random but designed to build up a complete textbook of everything needed for the knowledge of God, His dealings with men and women and what we must do to be linked with that plan.

This series of character sketches is written on the premise that, *'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'* [2 Timothy 3.16,17].

CAIN AND ABEL

The men and women of the Bible are real flesh and blood people like ourselves, not the stuff of myth and legend. The fact that Cain and Abel are referred to five times in the New Testament indicates that Jesus and the Apostles Paul, John and Jude all accepted

the historical accuracy and importance of these two brothers in the scheme of things. We make no apology for selecting two characters from the early chapters of Genesis to introduce the new series on Bible characters.

Every New Testament mention of Abel alludes to his righteousness. Cain is described as *'of the evil one'*, the antithesis of Abel's good example. *'The way of Cain'* is applied to false teachers who, *'revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain'* [Jude 10,11 RSV]. The contrast between the first children of Adam and Eve also shows in the meaning of their names.

THE OLDER BROTHER – THE SERPENT'S SEED

In the Hebrew language, Cain means 'gotten' or 'acquired', words that describe the grasping covetousness of the type of person who wants to get the most of what this life has to offer. David describes such as *'men of the world who have their portion in this life'* [Psalm 17.14].

After he was driven into exile Cain became the first city dweller [Genesis 4.17]. He was responsible for organising an urban form of society which today still gratifies man's desire to be self-sufficient and often caters for his baser instincts.

However in naming her firstborn Cain, Eve revealed an appreciation of the promise made by God on the occasion when the serpent was cursed for his part in causing Eve and later Adam to sin. *'And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel'* [Genesis 3.15]. These words refer to two 'seeds', or lines of descendants and to the eventual destruction of the serpent's seed by a specific male descendant of the seed of the woman. This enigmatic verse is a remarkable prophecy of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and its consequence, death.

As no indication had been given as to how long this process of salvation would take, it was natural for Eve to think that the birth of Cain was a fulfilment of the promise. *'Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD"' [Genesis 4.1].* Yet, as we have seen, Cain was of the serpent's seed and therefore not a righteous progenitor of the Saviour to come in the woman's line.

THE YOUNGER BROTHER – THE SEED OF THE WOMAN

Abel's name means 'transitory'. The same word is often translated in the Bible as 'vanity', including some thirty five times in the book of Ecclesiastes. The book opens with a statement on the emptiness and futility of life. *"Vanity of vanities", says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity". What profit has a man from all his labour in which he toils under the sun?' [Ecclesiastes 1.2,3].*

If Cain's ambition was restricted to the city he founded, Abel's looked far beyond narrow, earthly aims. Along with all the faithful men and women listed in Hebrews chapter 11, he acknowledged that he was a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. *'But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them' [Hebrews 11.16].*

Abel feared God and sought to keep His commandments, the very opposite of Cain's self indulgence and fleshly way of thinking. The brothers can be seen as heading the two divisions of mankind, defined in the promise. It must be significant that after Abel's premature death, when a son was born named Seth, Eve said, *"God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed" [Genesis 4.25].*

TRUE AND FALSE IN WORSHIP

'...Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of

the ground to the LORD. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but he did not respect Cain and his offering' [Genesis 4.2-5].

The reason for God's displeasure with Cain's bloodless offering was that it was not a sin offering. As such, it did not acknowledge the important principle established at the time of his parent's fall in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had hurriedly sewn together aprons of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. God replaced these with garments of skins, in the manufacture of which the shedding of blood was unavoidable [Genesis 3.7,21].

Consumption of blood was prohibited under the Law of Moses. *'For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul'* [Leviticus 17.11]. Hence Paul's teaching *'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins'* [Hebrews 9.22 RSV].

It is likely that Adam and Eve had trained their children in the requirements for acceptable worship including animal sacrifices. For his outstanding faith Abel received divine approval. *'By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead...And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him'* [Hebrews 11.4,6 NIV].

Not a single spoken word of Abel's is recorded in Scripture, yet his example of faith is still eloquent today in teaching us how to approach God. His offering acknowledged God's terms and because he fully believed in what he was doing, was a true expression of obedience and love for God.

We live in an age which encourages self-expression and toleration of different religions, so we need to give careful heed to the reasons why God had respect to Abel's offering and not his older brother's. In commanding Israel to be obedient, Moses exhorted *'You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you'* [Deuteronomy 4.2]. The tragic consequence of neglect is spelt out in Proverbs: *'One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination'* [Proverbs 28.9].

RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY

Abel died a martyr for what was right. For Jesus, Abel was the starting point for the witness of the prophets, whose blood was shed from the foundation of the world [Luke 11.50,51].

Instead of correcting his form of worship on finding out that God accepted Abel's offering but rejected his own, Cain reacted in a very morose and embittered way. *'So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it"'* [Genesis 4.5-7 NIV].

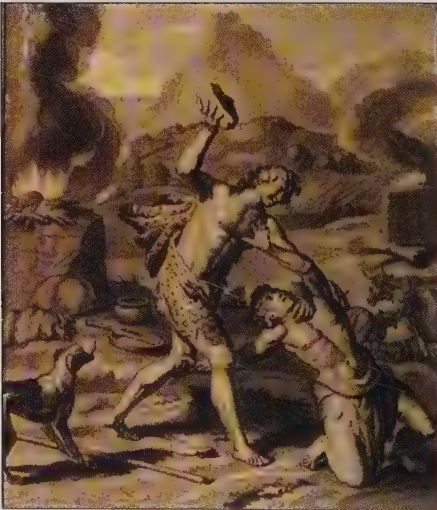
This was perhaps the first example of religious controversy leading to persecution that has always raged between the two seeds. The Apostle John wrote: *'For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you...Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him'* [1 John 3.11-15].

Jesus' indictment of the Jewish leaders of his day highlights the reason for the controversy that led them to crucify the Son of God. He

said: *"Why do you not understand my speech? Because you are not able to listen to my word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it"* [John 8.43,44].

THE FIRST MURDER

Cain failed to heed God's warning and grasp the opportunity to repent. He wilfully persisted and in a pre-meditated act sought to be rid of his righteous brother. The outcome reminds us that *'Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, but who is able to stand before jealousy?'* [Proverbs 27.4]. How much better if Cain had followed the principle in Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount concerning the sixth commandment not to kill: *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift"* [Matthew 5.23,24].



'Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And he said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground"' [Genesis 4. 8-10].

The inference is that Cain buried his victim under the ground to hide his violent crime. If the murderer thought that he had eliminated

all evidence of bloodshed he was mistaken. There are very many examples in the Bible of exposure of guilt, bearing out the warnings *'be sure your sin will find you out'* [Numbers 32.23] and *'there is no creature hidden from his sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account'* [Hebrews 4.13].

'AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?'

Cain compounded his lie, when having pleaded ignorance of the whereabouts of Abel, he went on to disclaim responsibility for his brother. The expression *'Am I my brother's keeper?'* has become proverbial. It is still used today by people who have abdicated their duty towards family and other persons. Any stranger is our brother, because before God we all belong to the family of mankind.

THE CURSE OF CAIN

"So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth"...*'Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden'*

[Genesis 4.11,12,16].

The rights of the firstborn to family inheritance and rulership were jeopardized by his display of temper and malice. Driven into exile away from the centre of worship, Cain the condemned sinner had to live with his guilt. Although God put a mark on Cain to protect him [Genesis 4.15], the murderer could not escape the thought that someone might take revenge for his cowardly crime. The Law of Moses had a very clear principle regarding murder: *"Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man*

deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death"
[Exodus 21.12-14 NIV].

THE END OF THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS

Psalm 37 provides a fitting commentary on the outcome of the lives of these two brothers, who stood at the head of the two lines of descendants from the serpent and Eve. *'I have seen the wicked in great power, And spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more; Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off'* [Psalm 37.35-38].

Abel did not die in vain and eventually his faith will be rewarded. In a limited way his life is an allegory of the outworking of the promise made to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The blow that slew Abel was temporary, compared with the eternal grave that received the body of his murderer.

However, righteous Abel was helpless to deliver himself from the power of sin and death. He died in faith, anticipating the coming of Jesus, *'the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel'*. The passage concludes with words that include a promise to all who like faithful Abel serve God acceptably:

'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.'

[Hebrews 12.24,28,29].

Duncan Cooke
Surrey, England

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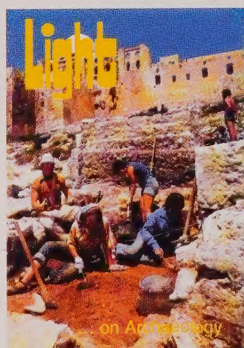
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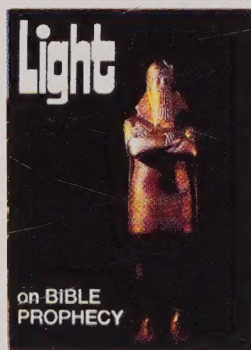
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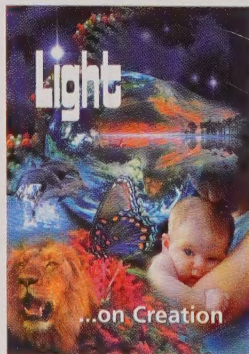
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